DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 102 EA 023 708

AUTHOR Lumsden, Linda S.
TITLE Stemming the Tide of Child Sexual Abuse: The Role Schools Can Play.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
REPORT NO ISSN-0095-6694
PUB DATE Jan 92
NOTE 60p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, Oregon School Study Council, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($6.00 prepaid; $2.00 postage and handling on billed orders).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT OSSC Bulletin; v35 n5 Jan 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Board of Education Policy; *Child Abuse; Court Litigation; Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; Interprofessional Relationship; *Legal Responsibility; Policy Formation; *Prevention; Program Evaluation; *School Personnel; *School Role; *Sexual Abuse; Theories

ABSTRACT

One reason all 50 states have passed laws requiring school personnel to report suspected child abuse is that the school may be the primary setting in which children interact on a regular basis with nonfamily members. Because teachers interact with children on a daily basis, they are particularly well positioned to spot unusual behaviors in students; however, unless they are provided with sufficient training in detecting and reporting all forms of abuse, their full potential in this area may not be realized. This report examines the role of schools in child abuse detection and prevention, focusing specifically on some of the unique problems and challenges associated with sexual abuse. Chapter 1 provides general information about child sexual abuse and clarifies some common misconceptions about this type of abuse. A number of factors that influence recognition and reporting behavior among school personnel are discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on areas that should be addressed in a comprehensive school child abuse policy, including procedures for handling cases of suspected sexual abuse of students by school staff. Sexual abuse prevention programs, and their effectiveness and evaluation are the topic of chapter 4. (46 references) (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED342102

Stemming the Tide of Child Sexual Abuse

The Role Schools Can Play

Linda S. Lumsden

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. Piele
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

EA 023708

Oregon School Study Council
January 1992 • Volume 35, Number 5

OSSC BULLETIN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Stemming the Tide of Child Sexual Abuse

The Role Schools Can Play

Linda S. Lumsden

Oregon School Study Council
January 1992 • Volume 35, Number 5

ISSN 0095-6694
Nonmember price: $6.00
Member price: $4.50
Quantity Discounts:
10-24 copies - 15%
25-49 copies - 20%
50+ copies - 25%

OSSC STAFF

Philip K. Piele, Executive Secretary
Stuart C. Smith, Editor
Linda S. Lumsden, Associate Editor and Production
Deborah Drost, Assistant Editor and Production
Raja Ismail, Publications Sales

OSSC GOVERNING BOARD

Guff Thorpe, School Board Member, Jefferson SD 509J
Mike Delvin, School Board Member, North Bend SD 13
James Maxwell, Superintendent, Lane ESD
Philip K. Piele, Professor and Executive Secretary,
Oregon School Study Council
David Conley, Associate Professor, Division of Educational Policy and Management, University of Oregon
Bill Korach, Superintendent, Lake Oswego SD 7J
Bob Stalick, Superintendent, Greater Albany Public SD 8J
Diane Harr, School Board Member, Oregon School Boards Association

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

1787 Agate Street
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403
(503) 346-5044
Fax: (503) 346-5890

The University of Oregon is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer.

Preface

Information about child abuse confronts us regularly. We read about abused children in the newspaper and hear about them on TV. And our hearts go out to these children. But how confident are we that we would be able to recognize signs of abuse in children who we come in contact with? Especially in the case of sexual abuse, where obvious physical signs are often absent.

Educators have a great deal of concern for the welfare of children. This Bulletin attempts to build on that concern by increasing educators' knowledge of child sexual abuse and offering some ways that schools and school personnel can play an active role in assisting vulnerable children. It begins by providing a general overview of the problem of sexual abuse. In chapter 2, factors affecting reporting by educators are examined. Chapter 3 discusses school policy issues, and sexual abuse prevention programs are looked at in chapter 4.

Lumsden is associate editor for OSSC. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in counseling psychology from the University of Oregon.

Contents

	Preface	iii
	Introduction	1
1.	**An Overview of Child Sexual Abuse**	3
	Definitions of Sexual Abuse	3
	Incidence and Prevalence	6
	Theories about the Causes of Child Abuse	7
	Factors Affecting a Child's Degree of Traumatization	11
	Who Is at Risk?	12
	Who Are the Perpetrators?	13
	Patterns of Sexual Abuse	14
	Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse	14
2.	**Recognition and Reporting Behavior**	16
	What the Law Requires	16
	Reporting Rates among Educators	18
	Factors Contributing to Underreporting by Educators	19
	Questions to Ask Before Filing a Report	26
	Providing Support for Educators	27
3.	**Policy Formation and Implementation**	28
	Starting the Process	28
	Policy Content	31
	A Sample Policy Model	32
	Sexual Abuse by School Employees	32
4.	**Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs**	38
	Assessing Program Quality	38
	Program Evaluation	44
	Conclusion	48
	Bibliography	50

Introduction

In recent years, the school has come to be viewed as more than an institution charged with nurturing academic growth. Increasingly, school staff are being asked to assist in preventing or intervening in a variety of pressing social ills. Although some people believe the mission of schools should be limited to meeting students' academic needs, a child whose emotional, social, or physical well-being is in jeopardy will not be free to devote his or her full attention to the task of learning. If a child is experiencing distress in one of these areas, ill effects are likely to be felt in one or more of the other areas.

The reality is that a number of serious social problems—including sexual victimization of children—are having an adverse effect on the academic lives of children in addition to hurting their development in a multitude of other ways. In light of both the short- and long-term effects of abuse, it is important for educators to recognize the role they can play in assisting abused children. McIntyre (1990) offers three succinct reasons why educators should work to ameliorate child abuse: legislation mandates it, professionalism demands it, and empathy for children subjected to cruelty and pain morally and ethically necessitates it.

The trauma of being abused is apt to interfere with and compromise a child's ability to attain his or her full academic potential:

> Child abuse and neglect is clearly related to learning. Research has indicated that abused and neglected children often demonstrate significant learning problems and below grade-level performance in key academic areas. If schools are truly to teach, they cannot ignore the reasons why children cannot learn. Dyslexic children or children who are mentally impaired or physically handicapped are given special attention by the schools in an effort to enhance their learning. Indeed, federal law requires that schools provide education for these children. The abused or neglected child is entitled to no less. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1984)

All forms of abuse have effects on children that manifest themselves in the classroom. Exposure to emotional or sexual abuse, for example, "may lead to increased distractibility and decreased school-related motivation, both of which adversely affect learning and performance" (Iverson and Segal 1990). Many sexually or emotionally abused children also participate less in the classroom and develop poor attendance, both of which can interfere with school performance.

One reason all fifty states have passed laws requiring school personnel to report suspected child abuse is that children who are being abused, particularly younger children, often have minimal contact with adults outside their families. The school may be the primary setting in which they interact on a regular basis with nonfamily members. For these children, whether the abuse is brought to the attention of child protective services may depend largely upon whether teachers notice and report it. As Fairorth (1982) puts it, "Educators are frequently the first and sometimes the last line of defense for an abused child and his family."

Because educators interact with children on a daily basis, they are particularly well positioned to spot unusual behaviors in students. Teachers' ongoing relationship with students gives them an opportunity to spot subtle behavioral changes that may be overlooked by other professionals, whose contact with children is likely to be infrequent and of short duration. However, unless teachers are provided with sufficient training in detecting and reporting all forms of abuse, their full potential in this area may not be realized.

Even though school personnel are mandated to report child abuse, several studies indicate that compliance with the law is far from uniform. In fact, teachers are often confused about or unaware of reporting laws in their state. Many do not realize that under the "good faith" provision of the law they are exempt from civil and criminal liability for reporting suspected child abuse, even if an investigation finds no evidence of abuse.

This Bulletin examines the role of schools in child abuse detection and prevention, focusing specifically on some of the unique problems and challenges associated with sexual abuse. Chapter 1 provides general information about child sexual abuse and clarifies some common misconceptions about this type of abuse. A number of factors that influence recognition and reporting behavior among school personnel are discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 focuses on areas that should be addressed in a comprehensive school child abuse policy, including procedures for handling cases of suspected sexual abuse of students by school staff. Sexual abuse prevention programs are the topic of chapter 4. This chapter explores program effectiveness and program evaluation.

Chapter 1

An Overview of Child Sexual Abuse

Child abuse in general, and child sexual abuse in particular, is an extremely complex problem. Although awareness is growing, many myths and misconceptions continue to flourish. Among school personnel, there is considerable confusion regarding a number of issues. Goldman (1990) contends that many educators are "unsure as to what constitutes abuse and neglect, are unsure how to make a report, lack confidence that the report will be acted on, and fear legal repercussions."

This chapter provides some background information about child sexual abuse and briefly touches upon some of the complex questions, challenges, and responsibilities with which we must wrestle in relation to this serious problem.

Definitions of Sexual Abuse

Even the basic issue of how to define the term child sexual abuse has been the subject of considerable debate. Giovannoni and Beccera's 300-page book *Defining Child Abuse* (1979) is a testament to the breadth of sticky definitional issues that plague the subject of abuse. They contend that "definitional ambiguity" in state legislation "has serious implications for the efficacy of these laws in protecting children and in enabling those who enforce the laws to act in a just and fair manner." Although they acknowledge that there are some behaviors that almost everyone would readily classify as abusive and others that clearly fall outside the boundary of abuse, there is also a muddy middle ground where consensus is not easy to come by, where disagreement reigns.

Laws pertaining to child abuse are not always consolidated. They

may spring up in criminal codes, juvenile court codes, and civil statutes. Within a state, the array of definitions may not coincide. In addition, the constitutionality of some recent statutes is still untested (McEvoy 1990). As McEvoy states, "While most would agree that legal protection of children is well-intended and reflective of deeply cherished values, much of the legislation poses great difficulties and challenges to educators as they attempt to comply with the letter and spirit of the law."

The Federal Definition

Public Law 93-247, the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1974. Among other things, the act defined child abuse and neglect generally and provided a definitions of each type of abuse. The definition of sexual abuse was amended in 1984.

Here is the revised definition of *child abuse and neglect* that appears in the act:

> the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen, or the age specified by the child protection law of the State in question, by a person (including any employee of a residential facility or any staff person providing out-of-home care) who is responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby.

And here is the act's definition of *sexual abuse*, as amended by Congress in 1984:

> (i) the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or having a child assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct (or any simulation of such conduct) for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct, or (ii) the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children, under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby.

State Definitions

Each state has adopted its own legal definitions of major forms of abuse and neglect, which are periodically enlarged or otherwise modified. In developing their own statutes, individual states have used the federal statute as a guide. Generally, most states provide definitions of various forms of abuse that are more specific than the definitions embodied in the federal statute. But, as Iverson and Segal (1990) note, this does not solve all the

problems associated with the task of deciding what is and what is not abuse: "Even with the increased specificity of state legislation, legislative definitions fall far short of the specifications needed to decide individual cases."

For example, two people may agree that leaving a child alone in a potentially dangerous situation constitutes neglect, but how each person defines a dangerous situation may differ. One person may believe that a parent who leaves a three-year-old child unsupervised to play in the front yard is exposing the child to significant danger and classify the parental behavior as neglectful. Another person may consider the danger insignificant and the parental behavior acceptable.

To add to the confusion, what may be clearly defined and interpreted widely as abuse in one state may not be similarly classified in another state. Vaughn Switzer (1985) comments on this lack of uniformity in both content and interpretation that exists at the state level: "On the basis of a 1985 survey I conducted of states and sample school systems, I found great variation in how child abuse laws are written and in how various school systems interpret them."

In spite of the diversity, child abuse statutes in all fifty states have some commonalities. One similarity that exists at the state level is that every state mandates the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect by school personnel. The statutes are written in one of two ways: they either require "all persons" to report suspected child abuse and neglect, or they mandate members of specific professions (such as physicians and educators) to report. For example, the state statute in Oregon lists "school employees" among those professionals who are legally bound to report suspected abuse or neglect. Either way statutes are worded, educators in all states have a legal obligation to report.

In most states, those who shirk their duty to report may face fines and/or jail sentences. In addition, they leave themselves open to civil action for monetary damages. In 1985, Vaughn Switzer reported that "the courts already have affirmed the right to sue in such cases." She then proceeded to cite a California case that was settled out of court for $600,000.

Other Definitions

In addition to federal and state definitions, researchers and practitioners have formulated their own working definitions of various forms of child abuse and neglect. According to Tharinger and Vevier (1987), the term sexual abuse is used "to denote a broad spectrum of behaviors that vary tremendously in degree of physical contact, frequency, and force." For example, Kempe (1980) defines sexual abuse as "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities

that they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles." A definition put forth by Sgroi, Blick, and Porter (1982) considers child sexual abuse to consist of sexual acts "imposed on a child who lacks emotional, maturational, and cognitive development."

Although a number of definitions of sexual abuse exist, most typically address two basic elements: the coercive power exercised by the perpetrator and the immaturity or dependence of the victim (Tharinger and Vevier).

Incidence and Prevalence

Obtaining reliable data on the incidence of sexual abuse is problematic for many reasons. In large part, this is because all three major sources on which most estimates are based—clinical records, empirical studies, and retrospective studies—have some flaws. For example, when pediatric or psychiatric records are used, the sample size from which estimates are extrapolated is usually extremely small (Gargiulo 1990). Although sample size is less of an issue in empirical investigations that use data obtained from social service agencies and police or hospital emergency room records, another weakness is associated with many studies that utilize these records—they overrepresent minorities and people in lower socioeconomic groups. Goldman explains, "The poor and minorities have greater visibility among social service agencies. By contrast, more affluent members of society seek private professional services. Thus, they are less vulnerable to professional checks and labeling." The considerable variation that appears in available incidence and prevalence rates is often due to "the method employed, population sampled, and operational definition used" (Tharinger and Vevier).

Another reason it is difficult to pinpoint with precision figures on child sexual abuse is that not all instances of sexual abuse are disclosed. The "conspiracy of silence" that surrounds the topic of sexual abuse produces underreporting (Gargiulo). This silence, created in large part by stigma and taboo, is not only the response of some victims but in many cases also extends to professionals.

How broadly or narrowly sexual abuse is defined also increases or decreases the rates that are obtained by surveys. And differences in reporting standards, touched upon above, also make it hard to get a handle on the actual occurrences of sexual abuse. For example, although most state statutes protect children eighteen years of age or younger, in some states victims are defined as persons sixteen, fourteen, or even twelve years of age of younger (Gargiulo). Of course, differences in who is classified as a victim

affect the statistics that are generated. Also, Gargiulo points out that in some studies statistics are only reported for female victims while in others figures are maintained for both genders. Still another factor that keeps reporting figures artificially low is that most estimates do not take into account child prostitutes or children who are the victims of pornographic exploitation (Gargiulo).

Theories about the Causes of Child Abuse

A number of studies have attempted to uncover the underlying causes of child abuse and neglect. However, instead of producing similar results leading to similar conclusions and the development of a comprehensive model of causation, several different theoretical models have emerged from the clinical research.

Psychodynamic Theories

Psychodynamic theories emphasize poor psychological functioning when attempting to explain abusive or neglectful behavior. For example, adults who have difficulty managing their own emotions will be apt to have difficulty caring for their children in appropriate ways; although they may be familiar with appropriate parenting skills, they are often unable to implement these skills consistently (Newberger and Newberger 1982). And those suffering from various forms of psychopathology will probably find it difficult to handle the unpredictable nature of children. Likewise, individuals with developmental disabilities or substance abuse problems have a diminished capacity for caring adequately for their children.

Psychodynamically oriented theories posit that parental abuse of children would be reduced if parents had a better understanding of themselves and their role as parents. Adherents of this theoretical orientation would probably pay special attention to facilitating healing in the adult, thereby indirectly increasing his or her capacity to engage in more acceptable parenting behaviors.

Learning Theories

Learning theorists claim that parents would be less apt to engage in abusive behavior if they had more knowledge about child development and how to care for their children. According to this perspective, the primary problem of parents who exhibit abusive or neglectful behavior is that they have a restricted range of parenting skills and techniques within their repertoire (Newberger and Newberger). Because abuse is thought to result from a

deficit of skills and knowledge, providing parents with a wider range of skills and options that can be used in interacting with children would be the primary treatment goal of adherents of this theory.

Environmental Theories

Environmental theories assert that the abusive parental behavior often results from societal conditions, such as poverty, or arises from societal values that condone or support such things as violence, racism, and sexism. According to this theoretical orientation, it is imperative to work for change in communities and societies rather than merely trying to effect change in individuals. Those aligned with this view might argue that if we are to reduce abusive behavior we must alter the social values, norms, and policies that support and perpetuate it (Newberger and Newberger).

Multiple Causes

Although each of these orientations sheds some light on factors that may contribute to child abuse, no one theory can adequately explain all cases. If a single theory of causation is embraced, a single approach to prevention and treatment will probably be pursued. However, if the problem is viewed as resulting from a constellation of interactive factors operating at social, community, family, and individual levels, prevention and intervention efforts will be more apt to address factors existing at all three levels (Meyers and Bernier 1990).

Another way of conceptualizing factors that contribute to abuse is mentioned in *The Educator's Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1984), which also emphasizes that there are multiple causes for abuse and that different combinations of factors are at work in different situations. In this publication, forces contributing to child abuse and neglect are grouped into four general categories: individual capacities, attitudes and values, specific life situations, and general community welfare.

Individual capacities consist of intrapersonal factors such as one's physical and mental health, intelligence, personality, and previous life experiences. *Attitudes and values* are cultural values that have been integrated by members of society. Attitudes toward children, changing family roles, violence, corporal punishment, economic and social competition, and religion are some of the values that may affect the probability that one will engage in child abuse.

Specific life situations that may increase or decrease a person's tendency to engage in abusive or neglectful behavior of any kind include

marital relationships, employment situations, presence of extended family members, housing conditions, financial security, and amount of social contact. In addition to the overt situations and experiences that a family is faced with, a family's coping skills are influential in determining how stressful experiences are dealt with.

General community welfare is determined in large part by various social institutions that affect families on various levels in either a positive or negative manner.

In general, the greater number of negative forces at work in each of the four general categories, the more likely it is that child abuse and neglect will occur.

Meyers and Bernier also note that "external stresses such as unemployment, and internal stresses such as inadequate preparation for parenthood or an atypical child, increase the risk of abuse and neglect." They believe that although a family's propensity to engage in child abuse may rise if the number of stressors with which the family is contending increases, "it is unlikely that there is a direct and predictable 'additive' effect." They conceptualize the variables as a chain; with each link that is added to the chain, there is an increased probability of abuse.

Goldman makes a distinction between actual and perceived stressors. He notes that while the perpetrator in abusive families often faces perceived stressful life experiences, the actual stressors that confront abusers may not necessarily be greater in number or intensity than those facing nonabusers.

When looking specifically at factors that are thought to contribute to or perpetuate child sexual abuse, the following have been suggested: patriarchal family structure, erosion of traditional external controls over sexual behavior, changing sexual expectations, family isolation, increased divorce rates and subsequent recoupling, differences in patterns of male and female socialization, portrayal of children as sex objects, norms of child obedience to all adults, and low identification and conviction rates for offenders (Trudell and Whatley 1988). Abuse of alcohol and other drugs by perpetrators also plays a role in many instances of abuse (Meyers and Bernier). As many as 50 percent of reported cases of father-daughter incest may involve an alcoholic father (Erickson and others 1984). Finally, having been a victim of sexual abuse places a person at greater risk of victimizing others.

Erickson and others identify several characteristics that may be prevalent in families in which sexual abuse is occurring. One of these is social isolation, which is defined as "the number and quality of relationships outside the family." They note that social isolation is not necessarily related to geographic isolation. In the absence of external sources of support, members in socially isolated families often tend to depend heavily on other family members for the satisfaction of their emotional and sexual needs. In addi-

tion, being socially isolated lowers family members' concern about having inappropriate behavior detected by outsiders, either through direct observation of others or through disclosure by the victim to someone outside the family.

Four Preconditions for Sexual Abuse

Finkelhor, cited in Tharinger and others (1988), hypothesizes that four preconditions must be met before it is possible for someone to sexually abuse a child. Both individual and societal variables may affect each of these preconditions:

Precondition 1: A potential offender must have motivation to sexually abuse a child. Individual/psychological factors that may be related to satisfying this precondition include arrested emotional development, poor social skills, a need to reenact childhood trauma, or exposure to someone who modeled sexual interest in children. According to Finkelhor, societal or cultural norms that may give rise to motivation in a perpetrator include the message that males should exhibit dominance and power in sexual relationships, the availability of child pornography, and the sexualization of children by the media.

Precondition 2: A potential offender must overcome internal inhibitions against acting on the motivation to sexually abuse a child. Use of alcohol or other drugs or the presence of an impulse disorder are individual factors that may lower a potential offender's internal inhibitions. On a societal level, toleration of sexual interest in children, relatively light criminal sentences for offenders, and viewing offenses less harshly when they are committed while a person is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs may help a potential offender overcome internal inhibitions.

Precondition 3: A potential offender must overcome external inhibitions against acting on motivation to sexually abuse a child. Overcoming external inhibitions may be facilitated by inadequate supervision of the child or physical or emotional absence of a caregiver. On a societal level, erosion of social networks and lack of social supports may be influential.

Precondition 4: A potential offender must overcome or undermine the resistance of the child. This may be achieved more easily when a child is insecure or deprived, lacks knowledge about sexual abuse, has an unusual amount of trust in the offender (such as when the offender is a parent, relative, or friend), or when the perpetrator resorts to coercion or threats. On a societal level, lack of sex education and social powerlessness of children are factors that are thought to permit perpetrators to more easily break through a child's resistance and gain compliance.

Factors Affecting a Child's Degree of Traumatization

A number of factors may intensify or lessen the degree of trauma a child experiences in relation to sexual abuse.

Nature of Relationship with Perpetrator

One of these is the identity of the perpetrator and the nature of the relationship the child has with him or her. For example, to have been sexually abused by a stranger carries different meaning for a child than does being sexually abused by a parent. According to Tower (1987), "the closer the bond of trust between victim and perpetrator, the more likely the trauma."

Duration of Abuse

Another factor that may affect a child's emotional response to sexual abuse is duration. If the abuse has continued over a significant period of time, the long-term effects on the child are likely to be more severe than when a child experiences a single occurrence of abuse.

Form of Sexual Abuse

The form of sexual abuse that occurred may also affect the child's response to it. For example, a child who is fondled while fully clothed will probably experience less guilt and trauma than a child who is forced to engage in rectal or vaginal intercourse. Also, a child who experiences physical pain and/or injury (such as when intercourse occurs) or who is a victim of other kinds of violence in association with the abuse is likely to be more emotionally traumatized.

Developmental Stage of Child

Since children are focusing on trying to master different developmental tasks at different ages, the period in the child's development during which the abuse occurs will also influence how it is perceived and dealt with on an emotional level. Because children develop both intellectually and emotionally at different rates, they will perceive and respond to sexual abuse differently. Their experience of sexual abuse will be colored, among other things, by their cognitive and emotional development.

Reactions of Adults to Disclosure by Child

The reactions of those to whom a child initially discloses the abuse

can also have a significant impact on the way the child processes the experience and the meaning the child attaches to it. A publication of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect notes, "The reactions of parents, members of the child's community, and intervening professionals to the sexual abuse of the child are of crucial importance in determining its psychological effects on the child" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1981). Insensitive treatment can exacerbate a child's emotional trauma. And, as Tower (1987) states, "disbelief or overreaction at the time of disclosure intensifies the child's feelings of guilt and blame. For this reason, teachers must understand sexual abuse in order to support a child's disclosure calmly and competently."

How and Why Disclosure Is Made

Whether the abuse was disclosed intentionally or accidentally also may affect the child's level of trauma. If a child's disclosure was intentional, what motivated the child to disclose at a particular point in time may be significant.

Child's Personality

Finally, the personality structure of the child also plays a role in determining what meaning is attached to the experience and how the experience is coped with. As Tower notes, "Two abused children in the same family . . . may react totally differently. Learning about the personality style of a particular child in their classroom who they feel has been victimized may help teachers recognize how this child will react and how to minimize the resultant trauma."

Who Is at Risk?

Child sexual abuse exists throughout our society; its occurrence is not confined to any particular socioeconomic group. Victims of sexual abuse include

> the children of professionals and white-collar and blue-collar workers alike. They are reared in single-parent and two-parent families. They have parents who lack high school diplomas and parents who have advanced degrees from prestigious universities. . . . the problem of sexual abuse exists in all communities and is being identified with increased frequency. (Daro 1988)

Although child abuse occurs among families living under the full spectrum of social and economic circumstances, certain factors may place

one child at higher risk than another. For example, evidence indicates that special needs children and adolescents, including those with physical or mental handicaps or those who display undesirable psychosocial behavior, seem to be at greater risk of all forms of child abuse (Meyers and Bernier, Goldman). Physical or social isolation may also place a child at higher risk.

Some authors contend that children of single parents face a higher probability of being sexually abused, purportedly because boyfriends of single mothers may have access to the mother's children. For several reasons, there is evidence that risk of being sexually abused is higher for children living in blended families. In addition to higher rates of sexual abuse among stepparents compared to biological parents, children in step families are thought to be more vulnerable because male friends of a stepfather may feel less guilt about violating a child they know is not the stepfather's biological offspring.

Finally, children in stepfamilies may have been sexually victimized by men their mothers dated prior to getting remarried. For all these reasons, children living with stepfathers are, as a group, considered to be more vulnerable than children living with both biological parents (Tower 1987).

In addition, children who have already been sexually victimized are also at high risk for reabuse, both because of insecurity and because of learned sexualized behavior (Pettis and Hughes 1985).

One recent study, which interviewed sexual offenders about the victimization process, found that perpetrators claim to be able to identify and utilize a child's vulnerabilities to gain sexual access to the child and maintain control over him or her. Vulnerabilities that perpetrators sought out in children were grouped into three basic categories: status conditions, such as living in a single-parent family; emotional characteristics, such as being needy, unhappy, shy; and situational factors, such as being alone and unprotected.

Who Are the Perpetrators?

In most cases, those who engage in sexual abuse of children are not strangers; rather, they are people who are known and trusted by the children they victimize. Tower (1987) states that 70 to 85 percent "of sexual abusers are known to the child, and at least one half of that percentage may be a relative or a family member." Daro provides similar statistics, noting that in a little over half of child sexual abuse cases perpetrators are a biological parent or stepparent, and in the other 50 percent of cases, the perpetrator usually knows the victim. Clinical interviews with both victims and perpetrators seem to support these figures (Daro).

Perpetrators are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, attempting to make generalizations about traits of people who sexually abuse children is not as easy as people may wish to believe. According to Gargiulo, "There is no single event or behavior that produces an abusive individual. Rather, abusive parents/caregivers are products of a complex interaction of personal psychological factors and particular environmental conditions."

Patterns of Sexual Abuse

A number of specific behaviors are used by perpetrators to gain and maintain a child's compliance and prevent him or her from disclosing the abuse. Manipulation, coercion, force, threats, and bribes are all means used by offenders to gain and maintain sexual access to a child.

In most cases, sexual abuse of a child does not begin with attempted or actual intercourse. Often the acts are initially less invasive. Over time, however, the behavior of many perpetrators escalates, becoming progressively more invasive. For example, contact with the child may initially involve nudity, disrobing, and genital exposure on the part of the perpetrator and then move to fondling, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal or anal intercourse (Sgroi, Blick, and Porter 1982).

Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse

Various behavioral signs are often exhibited by children who have been sexually abused, though any particular sign does not, of course, indicate conclusively that a child has been abused. As Pettis and Hughes state, "Unfortunately, except for cases involving traumatic injury, almost all symptoms [of sexual abuse] are nonspecific; that is, each could well be indicative of other problems." Although other stressors can produce similar behavioral changes in children, if clusters of the following symptoms are present, the possibility of sexual abuse should be seriously considered. Some of the symptoms that may be present in sexually abused children appear in table 1. Since the behavioral manifestations tend to vary according to the child's age, the list is subdivided according to the age of the child.

Ignorance about possible indicators of sexual abuse obviously reduces reporting rates among all segments of the population. However, a lack of knowledge concerning potential signs of sexual abuse is not the only factor that inhibits reporting. A number of factors that influence reporting rates among educators are discussed in the following chapter.

Table 1
Behavioral Changes Often Seen in Sexually Abused Children

Young Children, 4 years and under
- Sleep disturbances
  - Insomnia
  - Nightmares, especially with specific content
- Premature eroticism
  - Excessive masturbation
  - Seductive behavior
  - Depiction of sexual acts in play
- Fearfulness of normal nudity (diapering or bathing)
- Somatic complaints
  - Unexplained abdominal pain
  - Vulvar discomfort
- Regressive behavioral changes
  - Increases in separation anxiety
  - Bed-wetting (after having already achieved nighttime bladder control)

Children, 5-10 years
- Sleep disorders
- Premature eroticism
  - Drawing of genitals
  - Seductive behavior/pseudomaturity
  - Sexual aggression toward other children
- School phobia
  - Changes in school performance
- Somatic complaints
- Destructive behavior
  - Substance abuse
  - Running away
  - Prostitution

Adolescents, 11-18 years
- Sleep disorders
- Destructive behavior
  - Substance abuse
  - Running away
- Prostitution
- Eating disorders
- Pregnancy
- School phobia
- Somatic complaints

Source: Mulchahey 1990.

Chapter 2

Recognition and Reporting Behavior

Although educators are among a growing list of professionals who have a clear duty under state statutes to report all cases of suspected child abuse, many factors affect the extent to which this mandate is actually carried out. As Trudell and Whatley note, "The reality is that many mandated professionals do not fully comply with the reporting requirements." Iverson and Segal echo similar sentiments, noting that "it is generally agreed that maltreatment is significantly underreported in our society."

This chapter examines some of the factors that may interfere with educators' ability to report possible child abuse or influence their attitudes toward reporting. Particular emphasis is given to factors pertinent to reporting of sexual abuse.

What the Law Requires

In all fifty states, teachers and administrators are legally required to report cases of suspected child abuse to child protective services agencies or to the police (Fossey 1991). In addition, in some locales, school administrators must also inform a state educational agency of cases of suspected child abuse.

When a report is made in "good faith," the person filing the report is immune from civil and criminal liability, even if an investigation turns up no evidence to substantiate the suspicion (Vaughn Switzer). However, if a person fails to file a report, they can be subject to fines or jail sentences, be held liable in civil suits seeking monetary damages, or be sanctioned by state licensing boards or commissions governing professional practices.

The agency designated to receive reports of child abuse and neglect is

usually referred to as the department of social services, human resources, or public welfare, though other agencies such as the police department, health department, county or district attorney's office, or juvenile or district court are also sometimes designated to receive reports. The timeframe for filing a report varies from state to state; some states specify that a report must be made immediately, while others indicate a report must be submitted within 24 or 48 hours or some other time period. The form that reports take also varies across states; either written or oral reports—in some states, both—are required. In states where both oral and written versions are required, each may be subject to a different timeline.

Some school districts have developed a reporting form for the use of school employees. In districts where special forms are not available, an educator's duty to report remains unchanged—that is, claiming that you did not file a report because a form was not available is not valid, since it is acceptable to use any type of paper as long as the necessary information is included.

The following information is usually included in child abuse and neglect reports:

- child's name, age, and address
- name and address of child's parents
- nature and extent of the injury or condition observed
- reporter's name and location (sometimes not required, but extremely valuable to the child protective services unit)

Other than providing information about physical, behavioral, or other types of indicators of abuse or neglect, data that may be optional or mandatory are evidence of previous injuries to the child or to one of the child's siblings; information about the possible cause of the injury; and information about who may be responsible for the injury. It is important to bear in mind that a report of suspected abuse merely communicates that a child may be the victim of abuse. It is up to the child protective services agency (CPS) to make a final judgment about whether a child has been harmed or is at risk.

Many school systems demonstrate that they take the problem of child abuse very seriously by implementing school- or district-level policies and procedures that clearly delineate employee duties and responsibilities. Such issues as whether parents are to be notified when a report is submitted by a school staff member and, if so, who is to contact the parents; how records relating to abuse are to be handled; guidelines for destruction of records; and so forth may be addressed. In addition to reducing procedural confusion surrounding reporting, having a school policy on child abuse and neglect can help to convey to line staff that they can count on receiving the backing of

administrative personnel during the reporting process. (Policy considerations are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.)

Reporting Rates among Educators

The literature is peppered with contradictory claims about the degree to which educators comply with their legal obligation to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Some authors argue that only a small percentage of child abuse cases are submitted by school personnel while others maintain that educators are doing a better job than most other mandated reporters.

For example, figures produced by Fead portray educators' reporting behavior in a favorable light. He reports that of approximately 319,000 child abuse cases in which the reporter was identified, 48 percent were filed by professionals—12.6 percent reported by school personnel, 11.3 percent by law enforcement officers, 11.2 by medical personnel, 11.1 percent by social service workers, and 1.9 percent by daycare providers. In data collected in National Incidence Studies (NIS), school personnel were found to be a "major source of child abuse reports." Reports to CPS made by school employees surpassed those of "any other investigatory (e.g., law enforcement, courts) or noninvestigatory agency (e.g., hospitals, social services) included in the studies," reports Zellman (1990).

There is evidence that some statistics on reporting by educators appear artificially low due to the fact that the CPS office does not investigate all reports submitted by school employees. Because of personnel shortages, CPS often only has the manpower to investigate the most serious reports it receives. When only cases that are actually investigated by CPS are included in reporting statistics, reporting rates of school personnel will, of course, appear lower than if all reports initiated by schools are tallied.

Conversely, some authors claim that educators have a poor track record when it comes to reporting child abuse. For instance, Haase and Kempe (1990) contend that "although more than one-half of the children who have been abused and neglected are school age and attend public school, the number of reported incidents from schools remain low." Reporting rates are adversely affected by educators' lack of knowledge about possible indicators of abuse, but even when educators' suspicion is aroused, Haase and Kempe maintain that it often goes unreported. According to figures cited by Haase and Kempe, during 1986, school employees reported only 24 percent of the cases they had recognized.

Factors Contributing to Underreporting by Educators

Even though opinions differ regarding precise reporting rates among school personnel, there is general agreement that underreporting is a problem among all mandated professionals, including educators. In some cases, abuse simply goes undetected in the school environment; in other instances, school personnel may suspect abuse but, for a variety of reasons, fail to file a report, as required by law. Some of the factors that may influence educators' failure to report child abuse are discussed below.

Lack of Awareness of Reporting Laws

One reason reporting by school personnel is not higher may be a lack of awareness of state child abuse reporting laws. Several studies have come to the same conclusion—that it is common for teachers to be unfamiliar with the requirements of their state's child abuse statutes. For example, only about one-third of teachers in one study were aware of legislative mandates at the state level requiring them to report abuse and neglect (McIntyre 1987). In addition, 43 percent of the teachers claimed to be aware of reporting requirements spelled out in national law, when in fact there are no national mandates on reporting child abuse and neglect.

Researchers have also found evidence that when teachers do report suspected abuse, they often fail to notify the proper authorities, thus remaining in violation of state law. For example, in a study conducted by Lombard and others (1986), nearly 60 percent of the teachers in the sample reported suspected abuse only to the principal or assistant principal at their school, even though they resided in a state where the law required all reports of suspected abuse be made directly to the agency responsible for child protective services.

Given this evidence, a logical first step for districts seeking to increase compliance with state reporting laws may be to simply circulate accurate information about state child abuse reporting laws and explain to employees what their legal responsibilities are.

Lack of Adequate Preservice and Inservice Training

In addition to lack of awareness of state statutes, an even greater impediment to reporting appears to be a lack of awareness of possible indicators of abuse. It is indeed unfortunate that educators have been given legal responsibility for reporting child abuse without also being provided with adequate training to enhance their ability to detect abuse.

In a survey of teachers by the National Center for Child Abuse Pre-

vention Research (1989), "lack of sufficient knowledge on how to detect and report cases of child abuse and neglect" was the most cited reason teachers gave when asked about their perceptions of potential barriers to reporting. In the survey of 568 teachers from 40 school districts, 65 percent of respondents mentioned insufficient knowledge as a barrier. McIntyre (1990) emphasizes that teachers care a great deal about students and desire to come to their aid. However, he, too, stresses that teachers' "fears and/or a lack of knowledge may interfere with accurate identification and increased reporting."

Only 49 percent of the teachers surveyed by the center said their schools offer inservice workshops on topics related to child abuse and neglect. Similarly, only half of the respondents reported that their schools circulate written materials on abuse and neglect among staff.

Lack of adequate training hinders teachers' ability to detect all types of abuse, but it may particularly impair their ability to recognize sexual abuse, since most victims manifest no obvious external signs. A survey administered by McIntyre seemed to bear this out. A mere 4 percent of teachers responded that they were "very aware" of the signs of sexual abuse, and only an additional 17 percent of the sample responded that they would be able to detect very obvious signs. Seventy-five percent of participants acknowledged that they would be unable to recognize indicators of sexual abuse at any point (McIntyre 1990).

Similar results were found when 209 elementary teachers and 76 junior high school teachers in Iowa City were surveyed (Levin 1983). The teachers were asked to rate their knowledge of various types of child abuse on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very knowledgeable and 5 being not knowledgeable. The mean rating for perceived knowledge for the category of sexual abuse was 4.2, compared to 2.5 for physical abuse, 2.6 for physical neglect, 3.1 for emotional abuse, and 3.2 for emotional neglect.

Finkelhor and Araji (1983) identify several areas that teacher education institutions should address to better equip teacher trainees to respond to child sexual abuse and to teach sexual abuse prevention curricula:

1. Understanding the basic nature and dynamics of the problem and being able to discuss it in terms comprehensible to children
2. Knowing how to identify children at high risk for sexual abuse and possible symptoms of such abuse
3. Knowing how to ask a child sensitively about the possibility that the child has been subjected to abuse
4. Knowing how to react upon hearing reports of sexual victimization
5. Being familiar with resources for referring children who have such experiences
6. Being able to communicate basic concepts of prevention

Emotional Stress and Ethical Dilemmas

Most people would readily acknowledge that disclosing sexual abuse is emotionally stressful. However, there is also significant stress associated with the decision to file an abuse report. Unfortunately, little is said about the psychological turmoil that usually accompanies a decision to report suspected abuse. Instead, the focus tends to be on procedural issues.

In many cases, such as when the person under suspicion is a child's parent, teachers may know the alleged perpetrator. This, of course, makes the situation particularly laden with emotions for the reporter. And in smaller communities, townspeople may learn about and take sides in a case, possibly making life very uncomfortable for the reporter. There are indications that "school staff worry more than most other professionals about maintaining good relations with their school families, despite their lack of economic dependence upon them" (Zellman). One study asked members of eight different professional groups to rate the seriousness of actual or anticipated consequences resulting from filing a child abuse report. With the exception of child psychiatrists, principals were the most likely to rate personal upset as a very serious or somewhat serious consequence of reporting (Zellman).

Although teachers need information about possible signs of sexual abuse, their legal responsibility to report, and procedures for filing reports, they need more than this. It is insufficient to provide teachers only with an "objective" explanation of their reporting responsibilities and of the reporting process. Presenting the issue of reporting to teachers in a simplistic manner is unrealistic and unfair:

> Instead of illuminating the complex dilemmas around reporting, materials directed at educators most frequently advise them that their role is simply to report suspected cases of child sexual abuse to the designated authorities, not to launch their own investigations or to judge whether abuse has actually occurred. . . . What happens after the report is made is depicted as a neutral, objective process, sometimes simplified to a flow chart. (Trudell and Whatley)

Although they acknowledge that mandatory reporting is an important way to help prevent child sexual abuse, Trudell and Whatley don't think that the picture painted for teachers is always accurate. "Teachers deserve a more realistic portrayal of the complexity of the situation," they state. "The issue is simply too complex to be reduced to lists and legal obligations."

In addition to the emotional toll a decision to report may take, another thing reporters must wrestle with is the question of exactly what constitutes a "reasonable cause to suspect" abuse. People interpret "reasonable cause" differently, and, unfortunately, legal definitions are often not specific enough to shed much light on the subject. Ultimately, this means that when a situa-

tion is not "cut and dried"; teachers must use their best judgment.

Other kinds of ethical dilemmas may also emerge. For example, administrators sometimes have to grapple with what to do if they are presented with allegations of abuse against a staff member but no evidence is given to substantiate the claim. Cognizant of the great personal and professional toll a false allegation is likely to take on the life of a person who is wrongly accused, some administrators question the wisdom of laws that require them to report every allegation even if it is highly probable that the accusation is false. Although an administrator may have sincere misgivings about the truth of an allegation, Fossey states that the only really safe way to proceed is to go ahead and file a report. By doing so, the administrator is protected from civil or criminal penalties that would be able to be brought if a report were not filed.

Concerns about the Outcome of Filing a Report

Not only do teachers need to have a realistic sense of the ethical dilemmas associated with reporting, they also need to be apprised of the likely outcome of filing a report. As stated in *The Educator's Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1984), "sometimes potential reporters become convinced that nothing will be done if they report, so they choose not to report." With a greater number of abuse cases being reported and reductions in social service funding, sometimes all that overworked CPS staff are able to do is make a notation of the report in cases that appear less serious.

It is imperative for educators to possess detailed knowledge about how their local CPS agency handles reports. In addition, they need a sense of the probable impact reporting will have on a child and his or her family. Although we'd like to think that all reports result in positive outcomes, Trudell and Whatley remind us that "contrary to the assumption of positive outcomes after reporting, the impact of an investigation . . . on a family can be devastating, sometimes actually increasing the level of stress and placing the child at greater risk than before."

A Belief in the Benevolence of Parents

Another factor that may interfere with teachers' reporting is related to the cultural assumptions that most people make regarding parent-child relationships. As Erickson and others note, "Conventional wisdom suggests that it is 'natural' for parents to love their children and protect them from harm. . . . Maltreatment of children violates the stereotype of benevolent parenthood." Because the reality of abuse, especially sexual abuse, of chil-

dren by parents is extremely disturbing to most people, and because it calls into question some of the positive characteristics we like to attribute to parents, there is sometimes a tendency to deny that it could be happening to a child, especially to a child we know and care about.

Absence of School Policy

Many schools still do not have formal policies in the area of child abuse. A lack of clear written policies or guidelines may result in confusion among staff about who files reports and under what circumstances. In some cases, there may be policies and procedures on the books that have never been discussed with teachers or other school employees. Obviously, if policies are only on paper they are of little value.

Responses to a recent survey illustrate the need for administrators to make a concerted effort to inform staff of existing policies and procedures. Whereas 49 percent of school administrators polled indicated their district had a standard procedure for dealing with cases of suspected child abuse, only 24 percent of teachers and school nurses in the same districts were aware of such procedures (Goldman).

It is not enough for districts to adopt child abuse policies; once policies are adopted, administrators must ensure that teachers are familiar with them. Knowing what to do procedurally will help to reduce teachers' anxiety when they are confronted with a case of suspected child abuse.

When schools, districts, and state departments of education fail to adopt specific policies for reporting suspected child sexual abuse, teachers are left with a sense of uncertainty about how to proceed when they believe a child may be sexually abused. Establishing formal reporting policies legitimizes the practice of reporting and reduces teachers' sense of isolation.

Fear of Legal Liability

According to Illinois attorney Allen D. Schwartz, many educators are unnecessarily fearful of reporting suspected child abuse when they should be concerned instead about the consequences of failing to report (Illinois Association of School Boards 1991). Teachers are placing themselves at much greater risk of liability by failing to report child abuse than by reporting suspected abuse. In the past few years, educators have been charged with—and, in some cases, successfully prosecuted for—failure to report suspected abuse when the alleged abuser was a school employee.

When teachers make a report about suspected child abuse, they are ensured immunity under the so-called "good faith" provision of the law. That is, if they file a report in good faith, they cannot be prosecuted, even if

an investigation does not find any evidence of abuse. As McCarthy (1989) notes, "Individuals need not fear legal repercussions if they report suspicions that later are found to be ungrounded. . . . Courts have rejected defamation suits brought against educators by those accused of child abuse, even though actual abuse was not established."

Another related point of confusion is that some educators mistakenly believe that they must be able to substantiate a case of abuse when in fact they are only required to have a reasonable suspicion of abuse—the issue of substantiation is the responsibility of CPS.

The Principal's Attitude toward Reporting

According to Trudell and Whatley, "The reporting philosophy of the school principal has been found to exert an important influence on teacher reporting" of suspected child sexual abuse. When a principal strongly supports and encourages reporting by school staff, teachers are more apt to file reports. On the other hand, if principals are reluctant to report, "often for reasons related to maintaining good parental relations and school image," teachers are usually more hesitant about giving voice to their suspicions of abuse through formal reporting procedures.

Fairorth also speaks of the pivotal part a principal's values play:

> The role of the school in the area of child abuse and neglect will ultimately be determined by the educational philosophy of its administrator. Principals must decide whether it is the social function of the school to perpetuate existing conditions or to take part in their transformation.

Principals also affect reporting through their role as gatekeepers. They decide which reports to pass on to CPS. Many principals expect teachers to report suspected abuse to them for screening rather than reporting directly to CPS, even when, in many states, this practice is inconsistent with the state's reporting law. Often, laws specify that the person who has observed the situation must be the one to report it (Zellman).

Whether positive or negative, administrators' attitudes can have a potent effect on whether abuse is reported. Therefore, educating principals about child abuse should not be overlooked when efforts are made to encourage reporting at the school level.

Denial

Of the three kinds of abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual—the latter evokes the strongest emotional reaction in many people, who find it most difficult to comprehend. Entertaining the idea that an adult is sexually

abusing a child may produce emotional reactions such as horror, repulsion and dread, fear, and anger. In some people, the intensity of these initial uncomfortable feelings is overwhelming, so they respond with denial.

Denial may assume several forms, ranging from minimizing the seriousness and/or prevalence of the problem to failing to believe a child's disclosure of sexual abuse. To combat denial, we must have the courage to honestly examine our own sexual attitudes, values, and feelings. This process of self-examination may entail looking at how easily we are able to talk about sexual issues; reviewing what we learned about sex from our family, church, and society at large; and acknowledging our own sexual fantasies and impulses. Because this task is not easy, we may experience denial, a psychological defense mechanism that allows us to avoid acknowledging the problem for what it is.

Personal Feelings about Sexual Abuse

For teachers or other school employees who were sexually victimized during childhood, there may also be additional layers of resistance to becoming involved in reporting or prevention efforts. For these people, dealing directly with sexual abuse may reactivate powerful, traumatic memories. In some cases, a teacher who is confronted with a child suspected of being sexually victimized may even uncover repressed memories of abuse he or she experienced as a child.

Lack of Confidence in Child Protective Services

Often school policies and CPS policies on child abuse are in opposition. For example, schools are expected to report all suspected abuse and face the threat of prosecution for failing to report. In contrast, CPS has adopted policies and procedures that are meant to reduce caseloads by only investigating the cases that are deemed most severe. Even in locales where CPS has the resources to investigate less critical cases, often a considerable amount of time elapses between when a report is filed and when it gets investigated. If teachers and principals who report abuse find that CPS regularly decides not to investigate the reports they file, or that the cases they refer are put on the back burner, they may come to feel that their efforts are in vain.

"One must wonder," states Zellman, "how long principals will continue to report so actively if their reports encounter CPS animosity and are screened out at high rates." A "lack of responsiveness by CPS, over time, may cause this most dedicated group of reporters to begin to question their behavior." To avoid the erosion of educators' commitment to reporting, it is

imperative for educators and CPS workers to understand their respective roles and limitations and then to cooperate rather than blame.

Lack of Feedback about Disposition of CPS Cases

Another thing that may erode educators' tendency to report abuse is the fact that in many instances when reports are made to CPS by school personnel, the persons doing the reporting are never informed by CPS about what action it took in response to the report. When reporters are not told whether CPS chose to conduct an investigation and, if so, what steps the agency took to intervene in the situation, those filing reports may question whether it does any good to pass on information to CPS about suspected child abuse.

Questions to Ask Before Filing a Report

As touched upon in the previous section, deciding to report suspected child abuse is not easy. To help teachers examine a number of issues relevant to reporting, Tower developed the following checklist, which poses questions teachers should deal with before proceeding:

1. Have you documented your data and written down the information to organize it in your own mind?
2. Have you analyzed your data? What causes you to suspect abuse/neglect? List the symptoms—physical or behavioral.
3. Have you been able to observe the parent/child interaction? Does the parent see the child as worthwhile or different and/or hard to handle?
4. Have you spoken with other professionals within the school? Do they have reason to suspect abuse/neglect? Why?
5. Do you know the reporting policy of your school? To whom do you report?
6. Do you have the necessary information required for a report?
7. Do you (or does the school) have the telephone number and address of the agency to which you should report?
8. Have you talked with your administrator about the support you will receive once the report is made? What if the parents try to remove the child from your class? Will you have the support of the administration?
9. Does your school have on hand the necessary report forms?
10. Have you set up a support system for yourself with other teachers or administrators? (After the report is made, you may feel vulnerable and need to talk.) (Tower 1987)

Providing Support for Educators

In addition to addressing some of the barriers mentioned above, administrators can take other steps to bolster reporting of abuse by school personnel. Often overlooked is the need to provide support to reporters, both before and after the report is submitted. As Rogers (1988) warns, "Don't underestimate your staff members' need for support in reporting suspected cases of child abuse."

It is beneficial to have a resource person available to assist teachers and others with the emotional stress that accompanies filing a report of suspected child abuse. This person can also provide clarification about what is likely to occur after a report is filed, thereby reducing the anxiety of reporters. Instead of having a designated resource person, some districts elect instead to form district- or building-based teams that serve a similar purpose.

As outlined above, several variables may function as barriers to child abuse detection and reporting by educators. However the picture is not as grim as it may first appear. A number of the factors that tend to inhibit both identification and reporting—including lack of preservice and inservice training and lack of school policy—may be remedied relatively easily if districts are sincerely committed to doing all they can to assist vulnerable children. One of these areas, that of establishing and implementing school child abuse policies, is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Policy Formation and Implementation

The formal stance that a district or school takes in regard to child abuse and neglect can communicate that the welfare of children is a priority and encourage staff involvement in ameliorating this problem. According to Erickson and others, "It is imperative that each school district formulate written policies to guide their school personnel in the details of what they can and should do regarding child neglect and abuse." The primary purpose of child abuse and neglect policy is twofold: to protect children from harm and to protect the school from liability (McEvoy).

Of course, if schools want to maximize their potential in combatting abuse, they must see to it that policies serve more than merely a symbolic function. If policies are adopted but not made known to staff or implemented, nothing is accomplished. "Policies which are not implemented," state Erickson and colleagues, "may be worse than no policy at all. This is especially true if such policies communicate the idea that action is being taken yet there is no real change in outcome."

Starting the Process

Before attempting to determine the content of child abuse and neglect policy, decisions must be made about who will be involved in the policy formation process and how the process will be organized. Because child abuse is such a complex, multidimensional problem, it is important for schools to involve other professionals in the formation of school policy.

Nurturing Collaboration

Involving a broad constituency in policy formation "tends to break

down the fragmentation between groups and promote a feeling of personal accountability and pride in the overall success of the program" (Erickson and others). Handling of cases of suspected abuse will tend to be more efficient and effective if everyone works together, but proposing a collaborative approach is a lot easier than actually achieving collaboration. In addition to differences in primary areas of concern and divergent goals, professionals from different fields may harbor feelings of mutual mistrust, feel the need to protect their "turf," and experience a sense of rivalry and jealousy. If these problems are not worked out satisfactorily, the byproduct may be duplication of services, poor communication, poor leadership, and a lack of school-community agency cooperation (Erickson and others).

Isolation and dissension among groups can often be significantly reduced if separate committees are formed, each made up of representatives from all the participating groups. Each committee should be given responsibility for making policy recommendations in one specific area, such as reporting, followup, prevention, and parent education. Ideally, five to eight people—a good size for a working group—should be in each committee.

Erickson and others also suggest creating a coordinating council, whose function is to compile recommendations from the individual committees into a written policy. Like the committees, the coordinating council should include a mix of educators and nonschool personnel.

It is critical for the policy to be viewed as the culmination of a collaborative effort, not as an edict handed down from on high. If a policy is perceived as being imposed upon staff by an autocratic administration, it is apt to alienate those whose support is vital. School personnel should be made aware that the policy has emerged from the joint efforts of many constituent groups, including building staff, consultants, and community representatives, with central administrators serving as coordinators, not policymakers.

Collaboration is not only vital during the policy formation process. Ongoing communication between school personnel and other professionals is also essential. As Haase and Kempe state, "To improve the quality of services to abused children, both social workers and educators must understand the relationship between schools and CPS. They need to find better ways to cooperate in order to respond to the needs of these vulnerable children." Likewise, Erickson and others express a similar sentiment: "If concerted action in harmony with other social and law enforcement agencies is required of our educators, then it seems that a great deal of shared understanding is essential for all parties concerned."

Instead of waiting for conflict to emerge in the midst of a crisis situation, it makes more sense for schools to meet with other relevant professionals on a periodic basis. During noncrisis times, when emotions are not

running high, it will be easier to try to resolve some of the "flashpoints" that can create tension among involved professionals representing different agencies and interests. Areas in which controversy may surface include confidentiality, interventions, how to conduct child interviews, and information sharing (McClare 1990).

One way to clear the channels of communication is by designating someone to serve as a liaison between the schools and CPS. Ideally, this person should be a member of the local child protection team consisting of representatives of various agencies that have a professional interest in child abuse. The role of the liaison would be to educate others about school objectives.

Promoting Awareness of the Policy

Once a policy is in place, steps should be taken to ensure that staff members thoroughly understand it. It isn't sufficient to merely circulate a memo to staff about the newly adopted policy. To reduce confusion and clarify areas of uncertainty, staff members need the opportunity "to think and talk about the policy and ask questions" (Rogers). In addition, they should be informed that, as long as they do not knowingly file a false report, they are protected from liability by the "good faith" provision of the law, even if a subsequent investigation does not find evidence of abuse.

Policy Evaluation and Review

After a policy is implemented, everyone should be encouraged to provide feedback about how it is working. It is important to listen to comments and suggestions, to learn about which parts of the policy are working well and about which aspects of the policy seem to be less effective. Based on the input that is received, the policy should be assessed for possible revision. Again, the decision about whether to revise the policy should be a collaborative one.

It is important to engage in policy evaluation on a regular basis, not just shortly after the policy is first adopted. One reason for this is to ensure that the policy does not conflict with state statutes, which are being revised and expanded at an astonishing rate. Over 400 pieces of abuse and neglect legislation affecting schools and agencies were passed by states in 1986 and 1987 (McEvoy). As state laws undergo change, elements of a school's child abuse and neglect policy that were originally in accord with state law may now be in conflict with it.

Policy Content

Once a school or district has decided who will participate in the policy formation process and how that process will be organized, attention can be turned to policy content. Some of the components that should be incorporated in a child abuse and neglect policy are mentioned below.

Rationale

Before people will genuinely support a policy, they must be convinced that there are good reasons for its existence. Therefore, a statement of rationale should be part of a school's child abuse and neglect policy. The statement should emphasize why educators are particularly well-positioned to play a role in prevention and intervention, citing both educational and humanitarian reasons. Including current local statistics on child abuse and neglect as part of the rationale can also be useful in demonstrating a need to involve educators. It is also important to stress the district's commitment to the whole child, not just to the child's academic needs.

Legal Responsibilities

A policy statement should also contain detailed information about child abuse and neglect statutes and regulations that apply to school personnel. How these statutes and regulations are interpreted by the district should also be spelled out in the policy. According to Erickson and others, the portion of the policy dealing with educators' legal responsibilities should cover (1) the federal and state legal definitions of child abuse and neglect; (2) the legal obligations to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect; and (3) the legal immunities from civil or criminal liability for those who report or participate in investigative proceedings. Agencies having some responsibility in this area—such as CPS, the police, and the courts—should participate in formulating this component of the policy. In addition, medical, educational, and bar associations may also provide valuable input.

Reporting Procedures

When clear procedures for reporting are not in place, considerable confusion may result. Therefore, it is imperative that child abuse policy contain detailed information about reporting. Information on reporting should attempt to answer some of the following questions

- At what point should the teacher report child abuse? Suspicion? Reasonable cause to believe? (This may be

based not only on school policy but also on state law.)

- Whom does the teacher notify? Nurse? Principal? School social worker?
- What specific information does the teacher need to know to report?
- What actions should the teacher have taken before reporting to validate suspicions?
- What other school personnel should be involved?
- Who makes the report to the appropriate authorities? How?
- What information should be included in the report? (Usually dictated by state law and CPS.)
- What followup is expected on reported cases?
- What role will the school play in possible community child protection teams?
- What commitment does the school have to inservice training or community programs? (Tower 1987)

In addition, the person responsible for followup of reports should be identified in the policy statement.

Handling Child Interviews

An area that is often neglected in school policy is establishing guidelines for interviewing suspected victims. Decisions should be made as to who should be present, how long interviews should last, and where interviewing should be done, since all these factors could potentially affect the responses a child gives during the interview. As Vaughn Switzer notes, "Having a trusted teacher present might make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful prosecution later on."

A Sample Policy Model

It is sometimes helpful for districts to contact other districts of similar size to find out what policies and procedures they have adopted and ask how effective they are. Table 2 provides some guidelines for those interested in adopting a child abuse and neglect policy.

Sexual Abuse by School Employees

In addition to developing school policies and procedures that clarify

Table 2
Outline of Model Child Abuse and Neglect Policy

Policy	*Procedures*
Statement of school system commitment to maltreated children and families	• disseminate school board statement • define areas of child abuse and neglect • recognize parent feelings and rights
Reporting requirements that reflect state law	• publish legal requirements, with immunities and liabilities • provide report in oral and written form • designate reporting responsibility • appoint an internal coordinator and outline specific procedural action • identify a feedback/followup system
Inservice training and staff development programs	• appoint a training team • select training materials • plan a schedule of inservice events • offer education incentives
Designation of school personnel to collaborate with the community multidisciplinary child abuse and neglect case consultation team	• appoint a school representative/liaison on the case consultation • designate school personnel who can be used in advisory capacity • specify attendance procedures for case-related personnel
Identification of school/community resources as support services	• assess available resources • publish a list of service providers and programs with eligibility requirements • establish or utilize existing school-based teams for program planning
Promotion of primary prevention programs	• authorize schools to sponsor parent education programs • initiate a public awareness effort • designate school facilities to be used for family support services • develop parent education curriculum at secondary level

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1984).

how cases of child abuse and neglect will be dealt with when the alleged perpetrator is not a school employee, administrators must also be prepared to handle situations in which the alleged abuser is employed by the district. Although some administrators may prefer to believe it could never happen in their school, they must be prepared to deal with the occurrence of sexual abuse by school staff. Although rare, reports of allegations of sexual abuse committed by school employees against students have been climbing. By reviewing each issue of *Education Law Reporter* from the beginning of 1987 through 1990, Sorenson (1991) found that there were six cases dealing with

sexual abuse in the schools in 1987, ten in 1988, sixteen in 1989, and nineteen by the end of 1990, or fifty-one judicial decisions in a four-year period.

If an allegation is made against an employee, administrators must be ready to face the situation head on, not ignore it or hush it up. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. "Even in the early 1990s, when known to exist in particular school districts, [sexual abuse by teachers and other school employees against students] is often a well-kept secret," states Sorenson.

Screening Employees

One of the challenges administrators are faced with is ferreting out prospective employees who may pose a threat to children. As Baas (1990) states, "It's relatively simple to check on the basic professional competency of someone applying to work at your school. . . . But how do you make sure that your professionally competent teacher or bus driver is also morally competent?" One way that some schools are attempting to ascertain the "moral competence" of school personnel is by screening potential employees to determine if they have a criminal record.

Both AASA and NASBE endorse mandatory background checks for potential school employees to screen out people who have been convicted of child abuse or sex offenses (McCarthy). FBI checks are mandatory for teacher certification in many states. In California, everyone who applies for any type of position in the schools is required to submit to and pay for a fingerprint check. Broadhurst (1991) advocates checking all public records—at the state, county, and local levels—that may contain information about past charges of child abuse by the candidate.

Attempting to protect the welfare of children is a good reason to take the time to thoroughly investigate potential employees. An equally strong motivator for many districts is the threat of a lawsuit if the district did not show reasonable care in hiring and supervision of the employee against whom an allegation has been made. If a district is not sufficiently thorough when conducting a background check prior to hiring a person, and the person subsequently molests a child, the district may face a negligent hiring charge. In such situations, a third party, such as a parent, has the right to sue the district if the district hired a person who subsequently commits a crime while working for the district.

Such a suit was filed in Oklahoma, a state that does not even have laws requiring background investigations on persons applying for positions in the schools. In this case, the parents of boys who were sexually abused by a teacher filed suit against the district. A U.S. district court ruled that the district was liable because it hired a teacher who had a molestation conviction on his record and who was subsequently convicted of another sexual

abuse charge while employed by the district. The parents' case was particularly strong because a relative of the teacher had notified the district by telephone that the teacher had "pedophile tendencies." Lawyers representing the parents contended that the district had shown "a willful disregard or a deliberate indifference" for the students' safety (Baas).

In another recent case, *Stoneking v. Bradford Area (Pa.) School District*, the court held that public school officials had violated a student's Fourteenth Amendment right to "liberty" when they failed to protect her from being sexually assaulted by a school band director. This case paves the way for others to adjudicate cases involving child abuse of minors by school employees in a similar manner.

Decisions about Suspension and Dismissal of Employees

As soon as a report is made in which the alleged perpetrator is a school employee, the utmost concern of administrators should be to protect all students from the possibility of abuse by the person who has been accused. Where there is no statutory guidance at the state level, a determination must be made about whether it is in the best interest of the school community to temporarily place the accused employee in a restricted work environment, grant paid or unpaid leave of absence pending the outcome of a criminal proceeding, suspend or dismiss the employee, or allow the employee to resign.

If suspension appears to be the best alternative, administrators should bear in mind that "public employees have the right to at least an informal hearing on the charges against them before they are suspended, even if they are entitled to a post-suspension hearing on the merits of the charges" (Fossey). In a presuspension hearing, at the very least, the employee should be told what the charges are and be permitted to respond to the allegations.

If an employee is facing criminal prosecution, the school must decide whether to proceed with its own dismissal process or hold off on making any decisions until the outcome of the criminal case is known. Of course, in cases where criminal charges have not been brought against an alleged offender, districts still retain the option of discharging an employee for child abuse.

The criteria for school districts dismissing an accused employee are less stringent than are the standards that must be met in a criminal trial. According to Fossey, "A school board may dismiss an accused employee based on a preponderance of the evidence, whereas a court or jury can not convict him of a criminal offense unless he is found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt." If a district is considering placing an employee on unpaid leave pending the outcome of morals charges, the district should suggest that the

accused employee seek legal counsel before agreeing to this arrangement. Ultimately, each situation must be decided on a case by case basis.

Reducing Likelihood of False Allegations Against Staff

Although it is unconscionable for schools to protect abusers who happen to be school employees, schools should attempt to avoid placing teachers and other school staff in situations that could unnecessarily make them vulnerable to false allegations of abuse. In addition to becoming more skilled at recognizing possible signs of abuse in students, people employed in schools "need to be aware of their vulnerability to child abuse charges. They should be cautious in their relationships with students to avoid situations that may give rise to allegations that they are engaging in inappropriate behavior" (McCarthy).

Concern about potential false allegations of sexual abuse against staff has prompted some districts to go so far as to enact policies prohibiting all physical contact between teachers and students—including touching intended to comfort a distressed child. Rogers recommends that district policymakers ask the following questions to determine whether they are adequately protecting staff:

- Are staff members—teachers as well as nonteachers—put in situations that could open them to charges of child abuse? Would you ask a staff member, for example, to drive a single child somewhere? Would you expect a staff member who has an out-of-the-way office to work individually with children?
- Are teachers asked to administer corporal punishment?
- Do you train staff members adequately, so that they understand what constitutes child abuse and how to avoid situations that could lead to problems?
- If a staff member is accused, do you have procedures that protect the rights of the accused as well as the safety of the child? Do interviews take place during free periods or after school? Or is the suspect hauled off the job by official looking people from the child protection agency who are obviously interrogators? (Rogers)

Unanswered Questions and Unresolved Issues

To date, there has been little research done on sexual abuse of students by school personnel. Some of the uninvestigated questions for which

answers must be sought include:

> What is the incidence of sexual abuse against students in schools? Is school-based abuse more frequent and/or does it have more severe consequences than abuse encountered elsewhere? Are students at different levels of schooling more likely to be abused than those at other levels? Are children with special educational disabilities or needs or of a particular gender more likely to be subjected to abuse? (Sorenson)

Other unanswered legal questions that relate to abuse by school staff include:

- What is the extent of school liability if a staff member is found guilty of physically or sexually abusing a student?
- Are schools liable if they fail to detect a history of abuse in an employee who harms students after being hired?
- If abuse by staff is uncovered, does it mean that the school has failed to provide students with a safe environment in which to learn?
- To what degree does the law protect "whistle blowers," who may be subject to retaliation for reporting? This is especially important because the goals of protecting the child and protecting the school from liability may be at odds from one another if a school tries to suppress information to avoid tort action. (McEvoy)

As laws are tested in the courts, the interpretations and decisions that are handed down will reshape them and bring about further evolution.

It will take a broad-based effort to reduce the incidence of sexual abuse of students by school personnel. Each professional group has a unique role to play in attempting to ameliorate the problem:

> Researchers will need to study the incidence, prevalence, causes, and outcomes of such abuse; lawmakers and educational policymakers will need to formulate and reformulate state- and district-level policies to better insure that school-based sexual abuse is prevented or discovered and dealt with; and everyone will need to put forth their best efforts to create the attitudes and the types of school communities where the sexual abuse of children is simply not tolerated. (Sorenson)

In addition to adopting sound child abuse policies, another way schools are choosing to be involved is by educating students about sexual abuse. The topic of sexual abuse prevention programs is dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs

Educating children about how to protect themselves from being sexually abused through school-based prevention programs is viewed by some people as another viable tool that should be used in the fight against child sexual abuse. It is estimated that over one million children have been exposed to school-based sexual abuse prevention programs (Tharinger and others 1988). However, not everyone is sold on the idea.

Although some advocate prevention programs for children, others express reservations about the conceptual assumptions upon which many sexual abuse prevention programs are based (such as appearing to make children responsible for protecting themselves) and about the lack of attention paid to program evaluation. Those who harbor concerns believe that well-intentioned programs may have undesirable effects on the children they are aimed at helping (such as leaving them with fear or self-blame).

This chapter identifies components that appear to increase program effectiveness, looks at some of the concerns that have been raised about prevention programs, and examines the issue of program evaluation.

Assessing Program Quality

Sexual abuse prevention programs aimed at school-age children have been increasing at a rapid rate. At least 400-500 curricula have been developed (Tharinger and others). Unfortunately, the quality of programs varies tremendously. According to Trudell and Whatley, "Some programs have few, if any, problems, while some are in serious need of complete evaluation and restructuring." Tharinger and others also express concern that a sense of urgency about the problem has resulted in the development of many pro-

grams that are not well designed: "In the rush to respond to the tragedy of child sexual abuse, many essential preliminary steps in the development of prevention education programs have been ignored or skipped."

Questions to Ask

When selecting child abuse prevention materials, Tower recommends that teachers ask themselves the following questions:

1. Can the program be integrated into the regular classroom curriculum? How? Can it be modified?

2. Is the prevention material appropriate for the age of the students? Can it be modified? How?

3. Does it reach children with different experiences in ways that will be meaningful to them?

   Those who are abused?

   Those who have been exposed to abuse?

   Those who have not been abused?

4. Does the material encompass a variety of teachings that empower children in numerous instances? Can it be modified? How?

5. Does the program elicit input from the children, encouraging them to try out what they are learning in a safe setting?

   List the exercises. Can it be modified to include more? How?

6. Can the material be taught by a trusted adult—preferably the regular classroom teacher? What do I need to become more comfortable doing so? Reading materials? (List) More training? (Do I have a plan for getting it?)

7. Does the material lend itself to repeated use throughout the grades to help children integrate the information?

8. Does the material prepare children to be healthier adults?

   Examples:

   Problem solving

   Concerns of parenting

   Human development

   Stress reduction

   Asking for help

Self-reliance

Other

9. Can the program be connected to the community so that the learning is reinforced in other places? And does the material include or can it be modified to include information on

   Body awareness?

   Rights and responsibilities?

   Saying no?

   Asking for help?

   Knowing whom to ask for help?

   Recognizing feelings?

   Expressing feelings?

   Making decisions?

   Separating feelings and behavior?

   Taking responsibility for one's actions?

   Handling anger?

   Feeling good about oneself?

Source: Tower (1987)

Although programs won't incorporate all the elements mentioned above, by carefully choosing among and then modifying existing materials, a strong program can be built.

Kraizer and others (1989) also offer recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of programs. They stress the importance of adopting experientially based programs that incorporate role playing and other simulated experiences. To integrate knowledge fully, children need the opportunity to apply concepts to hypothetical situations and practice using new skills in a safe setting. According to Kraizer and others, the role-playing component of sexual abuse prevention programs is "at the heart" of helping children to reduce their vulnerability to abuse. They note that "communities and schools should not be satisfied or complacent if noninteractive, non-behaviorally-based prevention programming is currently being presented to their children."

Kraizer and her colleagues also found that after exposure to a prevention program called Safe Child, scores of a sample of preschoolers and kindergartners on a posttest were equal or superior to those of first-, second-, and third-grade students. They hypothesize that very young children may be particularly receptive to prevention education material because they "are not yet hampered by socialization and behavior shaping, which teaches children

to do what they are told." The "natural outspokenness" of young children can facilitate the acquisition of assertiveness and refusal skills.

Another finding of Kraizer and others was that prevention programs are not equally effective for all children. A correlation was found between a child's self-esteem and his or her ability to use skills taught in sexual abuse prevention programs. In the sample they evaluated, children with low self-esteem benefited less from the Safe Child program than children with higher self-esteem. Before these children will be able to apply prevention skills more effectively, ways must be found to raise their self-esteem.

Developmental Considerations

When presenting children with material about sexual abuse, it is critical to ensure that the information is geared to their developmental level. Adams (1987) provides specific information about how a child's developmental level tends to affect his or her ability to process and respond to information.

Children under Six

It is unfair to instruct young children to say no to adult authority figures, claims Adams. Realistically, young children may not have the power to resist inappropriate behavior on the part of adults, especially if the person is a parent on whom they are dependent or another adult that they trust and love. Because the idea that adults can be untrustworthy and may harm children is upsetting and frightening, very young children will be apt to ignore or deny the message or blame themselves. Programs need to be more balanced, she says, not only alerting children about possible inappropriate adult behavior but also assuring them that the vast majority of adults would never attempt to harm them.

Prevention programs should include more messages that reassure children that the majority of adults do not pose a threat to them. At this stage of development, children are particularly scared of monsters, ghosts, and other imaginary figures. Hearing about another potential danger lurking out there may be especially disturbing to children of this age. Also, children under six sometimes make faulty generalizations based on irrelevant data. For example, a child may notice that a man in a film about sexual abuse is wearing a red shirt and draw the conclusion that all men who wear red shirts are bad.

According to Adams, telling preschoolers that no one has the right to touch their private parts should be reexamined since there may be many legitimate reasons (hygienic and medical) why caretakers may need to touch children's genitals at this age.

Kindergartners through Second Graders

Children in this stage of development still tend to conceptualize adults as being godlike beings who can do no wrong. Therefore, if something bad happens, they assume the blame. At this age, children also continue to believe in their own omnipotence; this, in turn, may cause them to feel that sexual abuse prevention information is irrelevant for them. Another concern for children during this period may be the idea of being a "tattletale." Although they may understand certain kinds of wrongdoing such as telling lies and breaking rules, it may be less clear to them why sexual abuse is wrong.

Third through Sixth Graders

During this period of development, children make more independent judgments about people's behavior. They realize that adults make mistakes and can be wrong. Children are beginning to mature physically as well as emotionally and may have curiosity about sex.

Junior High Students

There is a strong emphasis on relationships with members of the opposite sex during this period. Many adolescents begin dating during this period, and some engage in sexual intercourse. To talk with adolescents about "confusing" touch may not be helpful, states Adams, because most touch for adolescents is ambiguous or confusing. Junior high students are also less likely than younger children to tell adults about instances of confusing touch. "Often," states Adams, "they are most interested in knowing: Does this mean he likes me? How far can I get her to go? And even abusive, exploitative touch or sexual interaction may seem preferable to a teen than nothing."

During junior high, teens are attempting to form their own identity and the issue of independence is central. They are unsure about who they are and about which values they will retain and which they will discard. Because of their desire to appear knowledgeable about sex as well as other areas, they are apt to be reluctant to ask questions about confusing or abusive touch or other sexual issues. Adams recommends that adults give teens at this age specific permission to ask questions about sensitive topics such as sex. Although junior high students are beginning to engage in abstract reasoning, they still need concrete examples and illustrations of concepts.

High School Students

In high school, teens are moving toward independence and striving to develop a sense of competence. They don't classify people in "black and

white" terms or categorize people as either good or bad. At this stage of development, teens are able to recognize that both positive and negative qualities reside in everyone. Students at this age also are aware of the complexity of life and recognize that some situations and moral dilemmas do not have a single "right" answer. They realize that many gray areas exist.

Concerns

Some people are concerned about possible unintended effects that sexual abuse prevention programs may be having on the students who are exposed to them.

There is controversy over whether it is appropriate to place some of the burden for preventing abuse on potential victims. Adams believes educators should be aware of some of the messages children may be receiving from prevention programs:

> The idea that children should respond in a certain way must be avoided. Children have the right to grow up free of unwanted sexual contact. That they don't does not mean they are obligated to know how to respond. Children may be getting the message that sexual abuse is their fault if they don't know how to stop it. This is exactly the opposite of what is intended. Prevention educators want children to know that it is not their fault no matter what they did or didn't do. But they are working against the moral development of children who believe if an adult does something, it must be right. So if it was wrong, the children must be at fault. Simply telling children otherwise is not sufficient if other prevention activities carry the message that children are responsible for protecting themselves. Self-protection strategies should be viewed as optional skills for children to have. Adults should be protecting children by not preying on them and by being alert for signs that others are.

Cordelia Anderson, a developer of the Touch Continuum and a pioneer in the sexual abuse prevention movement, expresses concern about the tendency of some programs to create guilt in children by overemphasizing the necessity of saying no to perpetrators. She states, "I see this exaggerated in a dangerous way that puts all the responsibility on children. The implication is, if you couldn't say no, it's your fault. Or if you say no and it didn't work, there's something wrong with you."

Particularly among young children, who are at a developmental level characterized by egocentrism, being taught self-protection strategies may actually strengthen children's tendency to blame themselves if they have been or become abused (Trudell and Whatley). Even though programs may stress the message that the abuse is never the child's fault, children may find it hard to reconcile this with the message that they should say no and take

other steps to escape or avoid being abused.

In addition, in some cases teaching children to resist inappropriate sexual behavior of adults may not only heighten their sense of guilt and self-blame if they are not able to prevent or stop the abuse but may actually place some them at greater risk of being harmed if they do resist (Tharinger and others).

Another objection is that sexual abuse training programs have the potential for creating a distorted view of sexuality in children's minds, particularly if deviant sexual behavior is taught before or in the absence of instruction about normal sexual development. Tharinger and others believe that "allowing children access to age appropriate information about sexual behavior, thoughts, and feelings is crucial to their ability to integrate information about child sexual abuse." Because of public controversy over the teaching of sexuality in schools, many prevention programs have attempted to shy away from direct sexual references. Programs are often marketed under the banner of safety education to increase their chances of being used in environments where sexuality education is taboo.

It is important to keep things in perspective and to remember that prevention education should be, at best, only a partial answer. Sexual abuse cannot be solved by teaching children to resist and escape. Ultimately, the greatest challenge may lie in attempting to alter social attitudes and conditions that tolerate or foster the sexual abuse of children.

Program Evaluation

As mentioned earlier, there has been tremendous growth in curricula dealing with sexual abuse prevention. Unfortunately, there has not been concomitant interest in the area of program evaluation. According to Tharinger and colleagues, "It is not known if sexual abuse programs targeted at children are helping to decrease the incidence of sexual abuse. Research that examines the effectiveness of child sexual abuse prevention programs is still sparse and limited."

Setting Program Objectives

After the idea of adopting a sexual abuse prevention program has been conceptualized, it is important not to jump ahead to implementation. Sandwiched between conceptualization and implementation should be another step: setting measurable goals and objectives. Engaging in goal- and objective-setting helps to bring visionary statements of purpose down to a level where it becomes more clear what tasks will be required to turn the

vision into reality. And unless specific, measurable goals and objectives are set, it will not be possible to select useful evaluation instruments.

Gray and Di Leonardi (1987) define *objectives* as "statements of acquisition or change in knowledge, attitudes, or behavior," and note that it is crucial to identify which knowledge, attitude, or behavior is to be acquired through exposure to the program. Also, it is important to explicitly state if a change is expected from one behavior to another or one attitude to another. The following example is given by Gray and Di Leonardi to illustrate the specificity that is needed. They state:

A typically stated objective for a parent education group might be: *To reduce unrealistic expectations of their children on the part of parents participating in the program.*

As stated, this is unmeasurable. The question must then be asked: How will this be done? The answer might be: *Parents will be given the rudiments of child development theory.*

In terms of knowledge acquisition, then the objectives can be further broken down to: *On a written test parents will be able to pinpoint the age range in which certain behaviors of children can reasonably be expected to occur.*

This objective can be made more specific by giving a sample question: *What is the earliest age at which a child can reasonably be expected to be toilet trained?*

1-6 months
7-12 months
13-18 months
19-24 months
25-30 months

They acknowledge that in the example above only knowledge acquisition is being measured, which may or may not also affect attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, changes in these realms would have to be measured separately, but the process of narrowing objectives as shown in the example above would be the same.

Types of Evaluation

There are two basic types of evaluation—formative and summative. Formative evaluation consists of ongoing feedback on the program that is continually cycled back to program staff so that adjustments can be made. The information provides the basis for modifying the program to increase its effectiveness. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of a stated period of time. Its purpose is not to produce change in the program itself but to ascertain whether the program achieved its stated objectives or whether the

program was cost effective. On the basis of summative evaluation, decisions are made about whether to continue or discontinue programs.

Measuring Knowledge Gains

When sexual abuse prevention programs are evaluated, typically an intermediate outcome is measured—whether children exposed to the program have greater knowledge about the subject at the end of the program than they had at the beginning. As noted earlier, it is important to bear in mind that just because a child experiences an increase in knowledge as a result of participating in a prevention program, this does not mean that the child will be able to use that knowledge to act on his own behalf. As Leventhal (1987) notes, we must recognize that it is extremely "difficult for a child to translate knowledge into behaviors when the sexual touching is done by a powerful and important person in the child's life." Since knowledge gain does not necessarily translate into behavior change, some authors have been trying to come up with additional ways of measuring effects of prevention programs on children.

Measuring Direct Outcomes

In an attempt to quantify a more direct outcome, Fryer and others measured changes in children's behavior by using a simulated stranger to approach individual children in the school. Both prior to and following a protection program, the stranger approached children in the school setting and asked them to accompany him. All child-stranger interactions were videotaped. Children who participated in the program were less likely than controls to go with the stranger. It was also found that those who refused to go with the stranger had higher pre-intervention scores on a self-esteem instrument and scored higher on a postintervention test of knowledge than did children in the experimental group who went with the stranger.

Leventhal characterizes this type of intervention as "innovative" and views it as "a first step in determining whether programs that teach about child protection truly are effective." At the same time, however, he cautions that before this approach is used on a larger scale, researchers must be certain that the use of simulated strangers to evaluate prevention programs does not pose any risk to children.

Another direct outcome that is beginning to be looked at is whether reporting of sexual abuse increases after exposure to sexual abuse prevention programming. Although there is considerable anecdotal evidence that reporting rates rise after children participate in prevention programs, "rigorous and reliable data" are needed before it can be claimed that prevention programs

boost disclosure rates (Tharinger and others). Leventhal suggests that a survey could be given to determine whether any children exposed to the prevention program disclosed abuse to an adult during the first three or six months following the intervention. The same survey could be administered to a control group and then the results compared. "If the survey was conducted 'blindly'," states Leventhal, "and there were more reports of children in the intervention group who told adults, then such findings would provide support for the belief that the teaching program was effective." However, he stresses the importance of calculating the sample size that would be necessary to pick up statistically significant differences in the rates of disclosure among the two populations.

In addition to knowledge gains, some of the areas examined in recent investigations have included variables such as comparisons of two different types of treatment, inclusion of a distress scale, and feedback from parents and teachers as well as children. Children have also been observed for behavioral changes such as discomfort concerning appropriate physical contact with adults or heightened levels of fear and anxiety.

Some Findings

Studies indicate that

- children do gain in their knowledge about self-protective responses
- older elementary-aged children make greater knowledge gains
- children retain knowledge over a three-month period following exposure to a program
- parents tend to discuss sexual abuse with their children more after joint participation in a prevention program
- a behavioral skills training program is more effective than a film alone in enhancing knowledge about sexual abuse (Tharinger and others)

Prevention programs have the potential for informing children about sexual abuse and promoting disclosure. However, it is crucial for schools to thoroughly examine available programs. If adequate time is spent assessing programs prior to adoption, it is more likely that conceptually and developmentally appropriate material will be selected for use in the classroom.

Conclusion

In one recent survey, almost 98 percent of teachers polled said they felt morally obligated to report all forms of child abuse (Pettis and Hughes). Add to this the legal mandate educators have to report abuse and neglect and you have a group of professionals who are strongly motivated to play a role in combatting abuse and neglect of children. However, unless educators are knowledgeable about abuse, many behavioral changes in children that could signal abuse will probably go unnoticed. This is especially true in cases of sexual abuse, where the indicators are usually more subtle.

Unfortunately, in most teacher training programs no mention is made of child abuse and neglect. Once teachers are in the schools, the situation does not usually improve; the majority of teachers are not given regular inservice training on child abuse and neglect. If assisting vulnerable children is truly a priority for school districts and teacher training institutions, steps must be taken to create a pool of teachers who know how to recognize and respond to possible abuse. Administrators must also be made aware of the legal and ethical issues involved in reporting, as well as the psychological stress involved in filing a report. Teachers need to be able to count on principals for support both before and after filing a report. As mentioned earlier, a principal's attitude toward reporting has a significant effect on whether teachers tend to report suspected abuse.

Another way schools can demonstrate their commitment to curbing child abuse is by adopting and implementing a policy on child abuse and neglect. Having clear, comprehensive policies and procedures that are the outgrowth of collaboration with child protective services staff, police, and other relevant professionals can reduce confusion and pave the way for more effective handling of suspected cases.

Sexual abuse prevention curricula are also a tool that schools can use to help educate children and encourage disclosure. However, it is crucial that potential programs be examined closely to determine if they are developmentally appropriate and to make sure they are not likely to create unintended consequences—such as fear, guilt, and lack of trust—for the children they are designed to help. Prior to implementing a sexual abuse prevention

program, districts should ensure that teachers receive adequate training that goes beyond their ability merely to present the material in the classroom. Teacher training should not only address issues related to instruction but also help teachers assess their own level of comfort in discussing sexual issues with children. Teachers who do not feel comfortable functioning in this role should not be forced to do so, since children will pick up on teachers' discomfort with the subject matter.

In all their efforts, it is important for schools to avoid attempting to work in isolation. Instead, school personnel should think of themselves as members of a larger team of professionals and community members who are committed to stemming the tide of abuse. If everyone works together, the results will be far greater than if all those concerned work in isolation. May the needs of vulnerable children be placed above professional differences.

Bibliography

Adams, Caren. "Considering Children's Developmental Stages in Prevention Education." In *How Schools Can Help Combat Child Abuse and Neglect*, Second Edition, by Cynthia Tower. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1987. ED 287 249.

Baas, Alan "Background Checks on School Personnel." ERIC Digest Series, No. 55. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1990.

Broadhurst, Diane D. *Educators, Schools, and Child Abuse*. Chicago, Illinois: National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, 1991.

Conte, Jon R.; Carole Rosen; and Leslee Saperstein. "An Analysis of Programs to Prevent the Sexual Victimization of Children." *Journal of Primary Prevention* 6, 3 (Spring 1986): 141-55.

Daro, Deborah. *Confronting Child Abuse: Research for Effective Program Design*. New York: The Free Press, 1988.

Erickson, Edsel L.; Alan W. McEvoy; and Nicholas D. Colucci, Jr. *Child Abuse and Neglect; A Guidebook for Educators and Community Leaders*. Holmes Beach, Florida: Learning Publications, Inc., 1984.

Fairorth, Jeanette Willan. *Child Abuse and the School*. Palo Alto, California: R&E Research Associates, 1982.

Fead, A. Kelley. *The Child Abuse Crisis: Impact on the Schools*. Arlington, Virginia: Capitol Publications, 1985. ED 262 365

Finkelhor, David. *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press, 1984.

_____. *A Source Book on Child Sexual Abuse*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1986.

Finkelhor, David, and S. Araji. *The Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of Current Approaches* (Manuscript VS-23). Durham: University of New Hampshire, Family Violence Research Program, 1983.

Fossey, Richard. "Child Abuse Investigations in the Public Schools: A Practical Guide for School Administrators." *Education Law Reporter* 69, 4

(November 21, 1991): 991-1008.

Gargiulo, Richard M. "Child Abuse and Neglect: An Overview." In *Children At Risk: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect*, edited by Renitta L. Goldman and Richard M. Gargiulo. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed, 1990.

Goldman, Renitta L. "An Educational Perspective on Abuse." In *Children At Risk: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect*, edited by Renitta L. Goldman and Richard M. Gargiulo. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed, 1990.

Gray, Ellen, and Joan Di Leonardi. "How Programs Are Evaluated." In *How Schools Can Help Combat Child Abuse and Neglect*, Second Edition, by Cynthia Tower. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1987. ED 287 249.

Haase, Carol C., and Ruth S. Kempe. "The School and Protective Services." *Education and Urban Society* 22, 3 (May 1990): 258-69. EJ 409 750.

Halperin, Michael, and Pamela Shuman. *Helping Maltreated Children: School and Community Involvement*. St. Louis, Missouri: The C. V. Mosby Company, 1979.

Illinois Association of School Boards. *IASB School Board News Bulletin* 473. Springfield, Illinois: IASB, June 18, 1991. 8 pages.

Iverson, Timothy J., and Marilyn Segal. *Child Abuse and Neglect: An Information and Reference Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990.

Kempe, C. Henry. "Incest and Other Forms of Sexual Abuse." In *The Battered Child* (Third Edition), edited by C. Henry Kempe and Ray E. Helfer . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Kraizer, Sherryll; Susan S. Witte; and George E. Fryer, Jr. "Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs: What Makes Them Effective in Protecting Children?" *Children Today* (September-October 1989): 23-27.

Leventhal, John. "Programs to Prevent Sexual Abuse: What Outcomes Should Be Measured?" *Child Abuse and Neglect* 11 (1987): 169-72.

Levin, Patricia. "Teachers' Perceptions, Attitudes, and Reporting of Child Abuse/ Neglect." *Child Welfare* 62, 2 (January/February 1983): 14-19. EJ 281 504.

Lombard, F.; M. Michalak; and T. Pearlman. "Identifying the Abused Child: A Study of Reporting Practices of Teachers." *University of Detroit Law Review* 63: 657-81.

Mayhall, Pamela D., and Katherine Eastlack Norgard. *Child Abuse and Neglect: Sharing Responsibility*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

McCarthy, Martha. *Educators and Child Abuse*. Policy Bulletin. Bloomington, Indiana: Consortium on Educational Policy Studies, 1989. ED 326 996.

McEvoy, Alan W. "Child Abuse Law and School Policy." *Education and Urban Society* 22, 3 (May 1990): 247-57. EJ 409 749.

McIntyre, Thomas. "Teacher Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect." *Child Abuse and Neglect* 11, 1 (1987): 33-35. EJ 350 817.

McIntyre, Thomas. "The Teacher's Role in Cases of Suspected Child Abuse." *Education and Urban Society* 22, 3 (May 1990): 300-06. EJ 409 753.

McClare, Greg. "The Principal's Role in Child Abuse." *Education and Urban Society* 22, 3 (May 1990): 307-13. EJ 409 754.

Meyers, Marcia, and Jetta Bernier. *Preventing Child Abuse: A Resource for Policymakers and Advocates*. Boston, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Committee for Children and Youth, 1990.

Mulchahey, Kristi M. "Medical Evaluation of the Sexually Abused Child." In *Children at Risk: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect*, edited by Renitta L. Goldman and Richard M. Gargiulo. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed, 1990.

Pettis, Katherine W., and R. Dave Hughes. "Sexual Victimization of Children: Implications for Educators." In *Behavioral Disorders* 10, 3 (May 1985): 175-82. EJ 320 983.

Rogers, Joy J. "Ask These Key Questions When You Review Child Abuse Reporting Policies." *The American School Board Journal* (January 1988): 33-34. EJ 367 318.

Sorensen, Teena, and Barbara Snow. "How Children Tell: The Process of Disclosure in Child Sexual Abuse." *Child Welfare* 70, 1 (January-February 1990): 3-15. EJ 421 828.

Sorenson, Gail. "Sexual Abuse in Schools: Reported Court Cases from 1987-1990." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 27, 4 (November 1991): 460-80.

Tharinger, Deborah, and Ellen Vevier. "Child Sexual Abuse: A Review and Intervention Framework for the Teacher." *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 20, 4 (Summer 1987): 12-24.

Tharinger, Deboarh; James J. Krivacska; Marsha Laye-McDonough; Linda Jamison; Gayle G. Vincent; and Andrew D. Hedlund. "Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: An Analysis of Issues, Educational Programs, and Research Findings." *School Psychology Review* 17, 4 (1988): 614-34.

Tower, Cynthia. *How Schools Can Help Combat Child Abuse and Neglect*. Second Edition. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1987. ED 287 249.

_____. *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990.

Trudell, Bonnie, and Mariamne H. Whatley. "School Sexual Abuse Prevention: Unintended Consequences and Dilemmas." *Child Abuse and Neglect* 12 (1988): 103-13. EJ 370 363.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Child Sexual Abuse: Incest, Assault, and Sexual Exploitation*. Washington, D.C.: Author. April 1981. 18 pages.

_____. *The Educator's Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, D.C.: Author. September 1984. 53 pages.

Vaughn Switzer, Jacqueline. "Now's the Time to Reexamine Your Policy on Reporting Child Abuse." *The American School Board Journal* 172, 11 (November 1985): 41-43. EJ 328 014.

Washington State School Directors' Association. *Policy Development News*. Olympia, Washington: WSSDA. June 1991. 4 pages.

Zellman, Gail L. "Linking Schools and Social Services: The Case of Child Abuse Reporting." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 12, 1 (Spring 1990): 41-55. EJ 414 309.

Oregon School Study Council
University of Oregon
1787 Agate Street
Eugene OR 97403

Nonprofit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Eugene OR
Permit No. 63

OSSC BULLETIN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE